

A Different Type of Community Tour

By Edgar Blatchford, Commissioner

Ronald Reagan said it best, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, ‘I’m from the Government and I’m here to help.’” He recognized that many people are very skeptical about the bureaucracy of big government.

Governor Frank H. Murkowski is also mindful of this skepticism as he prepares to travel to communities this summer and, in fact, has asked his Commissioners to be mindful as well. But we won’t be telling you “I’m here to help,” we’ll be there to listen.

It is not unusual for economists, economic development specialists and marketers to be dispatched to a community to help “spur development.” There are a lot of formulas and theories that these professionals use to make recommendations. The piece that is often missing is input from the community. Realistic ideas that come from residents, with families, cultures, and lives touched by the proposed development initiatives.

Those of us who represent this administration often find ourselves attempting to remind folks in Washington D.C. that Alaska is different from the rest of the United States. We tell them Alaska cannot be compared to other states because most of Alaska has no road system, some of Alaska has no water and sewer, and all of Alaska is remote by Lower 48 standards.

Alaska is different, that’s true. But what is also true is that Western Alaska is different from Southeast Alaska; that Bethel is different from Nome; that every municipality and village has its own very distinct identity. What works for Elim may not work for neighboring Golovin. The Governor is very aware of this and wants those of us charged with implementing and running programs to have first-hand knowledge of how our initiatives affect the people.

You may see me in your community this summer. I will be there to listen. I want to hear your views. I want to know how the initiatives that we have implemented are affecting you. We have statistics and facts that tell us the number of jobs in the state are up, funding for education is higher than it has ever been, and Alaska’s key industries have been given the flexibility they need to grow exponentially. Are these positive indicators touching your life? Have you noticed improvements in your community?

While I’m in your community I’ll also be looking for your ideas on how state government may take a positive role in assisting your community address its most pressing issues. We want to identify initiatives that will work because they come from the people who stand to benefit from them. Be prepared to talk because I am prepared to listen.

Governor Frank H. Murkowski appointed Edgar Blatchford Commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development in January of

2003. He is an Associate Professor of Journalism and Public Communications at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, currently on leave.